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The Philosophy of Nudism

How the Nudist Observes and Explains His World

The point of departure for the nudist movement is the importance of sun and air to the health. Nakedness, as we shall see, is advocated for other than physical reasons, but it is characteristic of our scientific age that the nudist philosophy — for it may well be called a philosophy if the word is taken to mean an ordered system and rule of life — has its origin in the discoveries of science.

The nudist movement is defined as tending toward cure without drugs, life in accordance with natural laws, and health through air, water, and sunlight. The last term mentioned is the most important of all.

Nudism is only an outgrowth of a Beauty Movement which attempts to improve the body aesthetically, and as a development of a Youth Movement looking for freedom and a better civilization than that of the older generation, would never have reached the tremendous proportions it has in Germany today.

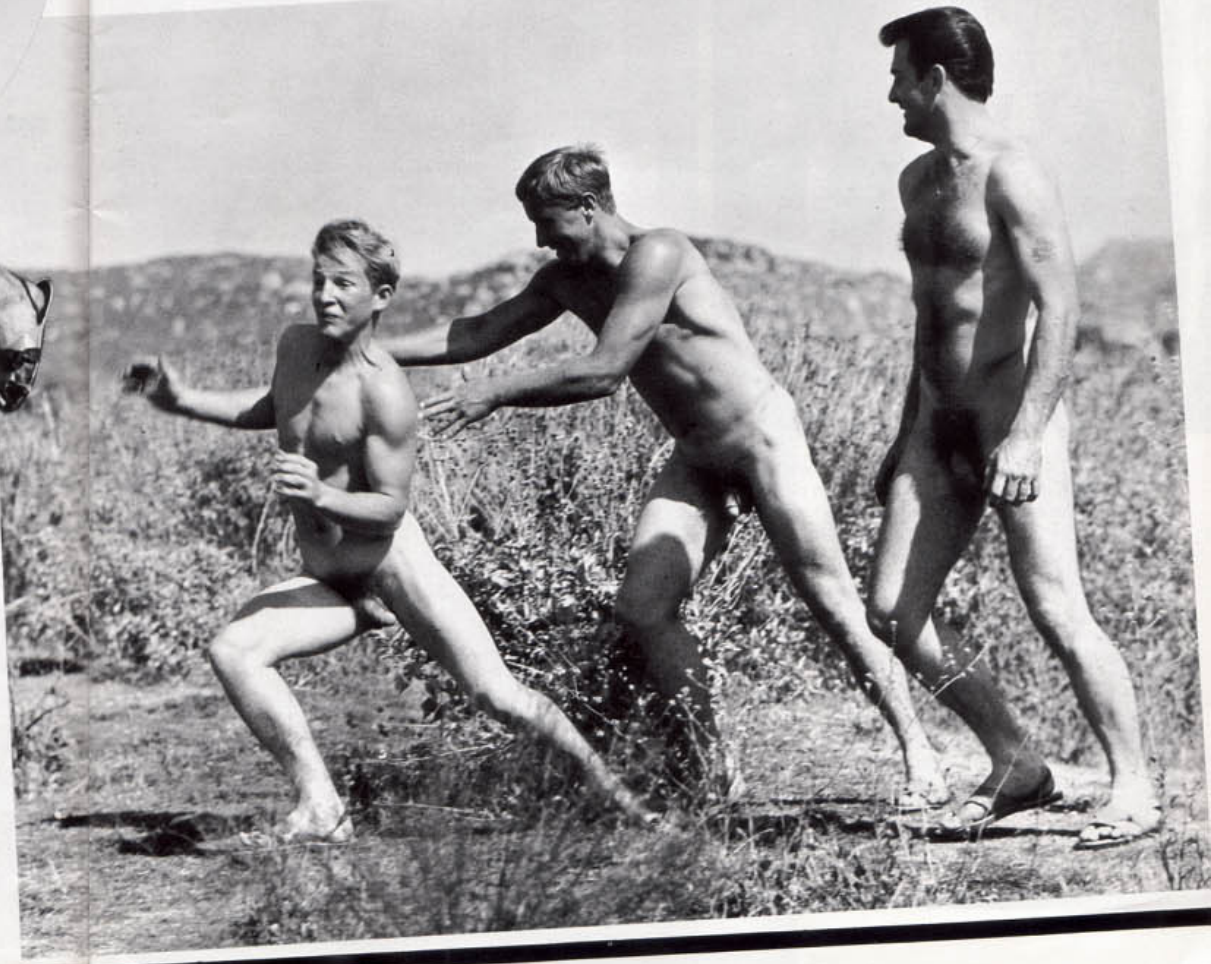
The use of sun and air in modern therapy is almost too familiar to require emphasis. Violet rays are as characteristic of medicine today as vitamins. Although knowledge of the properties of the ultraviolet rays and scientific analysis of the sun's spectrum are comparatively recent, the curative qualities of the sun were known in antiquity.

It was not until the modern era that the use of light and air in healing was established on a scientific basis. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Faure, La Peyre and Le Comte in France, treated ulcers with the sun's rays.

As for airbaths, we find their benefits were discovered about the same time by no less a discoverer than Benjamin Franklin. So Franklin, a forerunner on so many subjects, seems to have been the first American apostle of nudism.

The sun and airbaths have not remained cures, to be used only as remedies for specific diseases. Many people believe, and experience seems to bear them out, that these are beneficial for the healthy and normal; the body is strengthened and disease is warded off by the increased metabolism resulting from airbathing, and sunbaths effect a reduction of blood-pressure, relief from congestion, increase in the power of the blood to kill disease germs, and retention of phosphorous and calcium. It is the extension of sun and airbathing beyond the province of treatment for the ill to that of preventive hygiene that is significant in the nudist movement.

Aside from all chemical and physical action of violet rays on the body, a marked psychological



effect has been noted. This is highly important in view of the close connection—stressed in modern medicine—between mental and physical conditions. Exposure to light is immensely stimulating to all those suffering from melancholy, worry, lassitude and insomnia. We can personally testify from our experience in Germany that troublesome thoughts melt away in a sunbath and are replaced by peace

of mind and a sense of contentment and well-being.

It is difficult in the case of sunbaths to determine jsut what part is played by violet rays and what part by the air on the naked body. A sunbath is also an airbath. Many authorities believe that the improvement in the health from sunbathing is due largely to increased metabolism from exposure to the air.

At any rate, it is certain that exposure to the open air does increase metabolism. The higher the velocity of air, the greater the metabolism.

Clothing creates an artificial atmosphere for the body — warm, humid, and stale. The skin plays an important part in regulating body temperature, a function clothing disturbs as it retains the heat and prevents the evaporation of perspiration. In hot weather clothing causes prickly heat, from the soaking of the sun in perspiration that is not evaporated normally.

If clothing did no more harm than to impede our

exercises, shut out violet rays, and prevent the air from circulating on the skin, the case against it would be strong enough. But clothes have been guilty of more; irrational fashions throughout the ages have warped the human figure and, especially in the case of women, have caused veritable deformities.

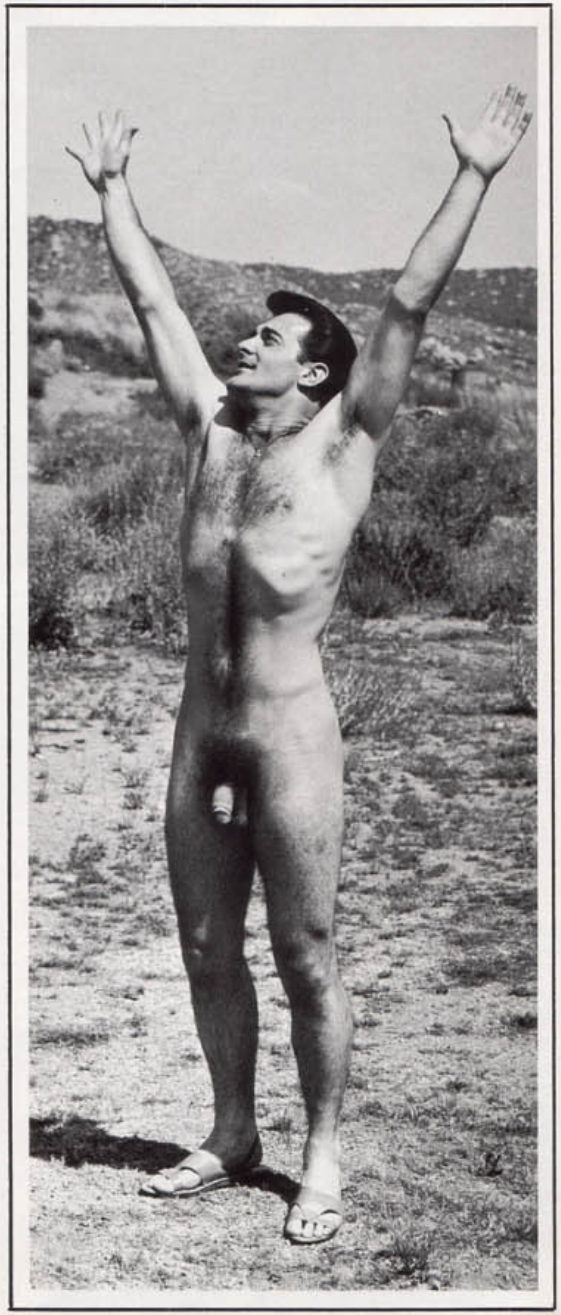
The nudists, however, are not asking us to take off our clothes in our northern winters and go bare in the Arctic. Although some Swiss and German devotees demonstrate that one can ski in comfort without a rag on the body, or that a roll in the snow naked is stimulating to a hardy constitution, even they do not insist that no one should ever wear clothes. All they urge is that nudity in the open air, whenever conditions permit — most people live in a climate where there is sun and warmth part of the time — is desirable for the sake of the health.

Another facet in the philosophy of the nudist movement is nudity and beauty.

No doubt vanity is, after all, a greater obstacle to the nudist movement, than modesty or shame. In view of the decorative origin of dress, and the important role it still plays in attraction, it is not to

be wondered at if women particularly should be unwilling to abandon such a potent method of enhancing their charms. Most men and women are painfully aware of their physical shortcomings and appreciate the advantages of what Nietzsche called the "masquerade" of clothing. Many, too, who have no reason to be ashamed of their own bodily endowments, shuddering at the thought of the ugliness that would be revealed if all humanity were naked, oppose nudity on aesthetic grounds.

The perfect body, of course, is not ugly, or artists would never have set up the well-formed human figure as an ideal of beauty, and time and time again have devoted themselves to its representation. Anyone who finds the masterpieces of Greek sculpture ugly is in a pathological condition. It is true unfortunately that few of our contemporaries even approach the classical standards of physical perfection. There are people, the extremely misshapen — after all comparatively few — who are better to look at with some kind of covering, no matter how inartistic or ridiculous that covering



may be. Others undoubtedly gain by being undressed, those who have healthy, symmetrical bodies but plain, or those who have downright homely faces, or those who dress in such a way as to obscure their physical attractions.

For it cannot be assumed that clothes are necessarily attractive, any more than are bodies. Some styles are absurd or hideous — as we can usually appreciate when they have ceased to be in style — and even when the fashions themselves are aesthetically pleasing, there are always plenty of people, probably the majority, who are too careless, or too lacking in taste, or too poor, to dress in a becoming manner.

Also, it is more likely that the feeling many have of the ugliness of the naked form would be considerably modified once all idea of shame or evil associated with the body had been dispelled. Even people who consider themselves emancipated, and who recognize rationally that there is nothing shameful in nakedness, cannot avoid having their emotional reactions colored unconsciously by the conventions according to which they were reared. The practice of nudity in common would rid them of this feeling as no amount of theory or reasoning could.

Furthermore, the very practice of nudity increases the beauty of the body. Nor is it necessary

to wait long for the first improvement. Although the body on being released from its wrappings may look sickly, anaemic and pale, merely a brief exposure to the sun will give the skin a beauty exceeding that of the most delicate, sheltered, lily-white complexion.

With exposure to the sun and air, the skin also becomes smoother and more silky, and many little blemishes vanish. There is no doubt that it is toughened so as to withstand irritations that would roughen or break a delicate skin. Men whose faces are tanned on a vacation, provided of course they are not burned, have discovered this in shaving.

Hence, in spite of the unloveliness of humanity on first discarding its garment, there is hope for its rapid embellishment. This prospect is particularly bright for the generation following the pioneers in nudity. For if children are brought up according to nudists' doctrines from birth, they should be physically stronger and more graceful; clothes will neither warp their figures nor serve as a masquerade for remediable defects.

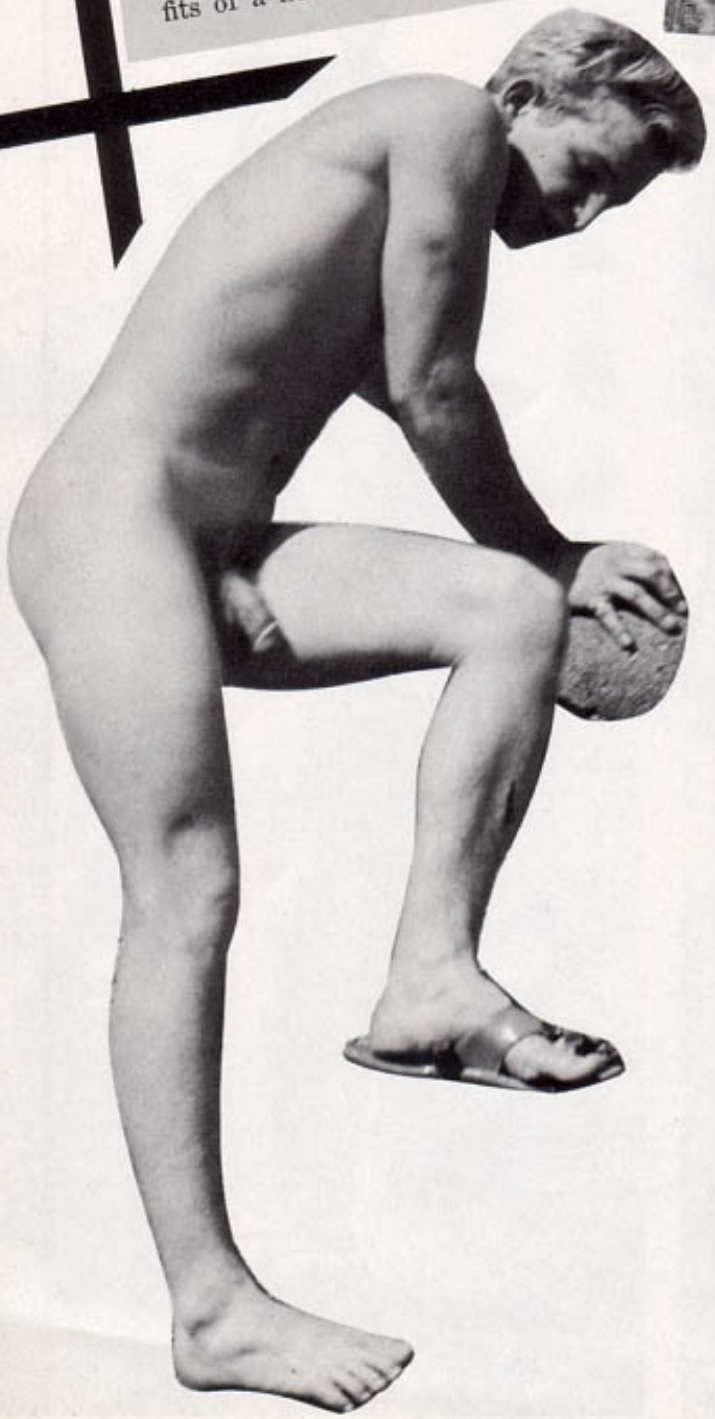
Nudism in Europe

There is a lack of general knowledge or comprehension, in America, of the nudist movement and the extent of the movement in Europe. Even in New York, in the so-called intellectual class, which theoretically should be best informed regarding ideas and events in Europe, has a vague notion that a few foreign freaks and fanatics have sporadic outbursts of trying to live without clothes, manifesting either a scandalous libertinism or a hare-brained back to naturism. If Americans have heard of nudist colonies, they have put them down at best as aggregations of cranks, the zealots of a mad Utopia, no more significant or interesting, save in their shocking aspects, than the colony of some crazy prophet of a new religious or social scheme.

Vague accounts, with few exceptions, of incidents in the nudist colonies, have been reported in some of the various newspapers in America. Occasionally, the background and significance of the nudist colonies is reported with some accuracy so that readers could get a petit insight into the world of nudism in Europe. The publishers would sometimes describe the hav-

ens for the jay-birds, their aims, and motivations for becoming nudists in the first place. Many times, often than not, the descriptions were brief and right to the point.

The nudist movement is a movement within itself. It is not one of revolution, nor of spreading the movement so completely as to run dress and fashion designers out of business. Many people believe that this is the direct aim of the nudists but it is not so. The movement only spreads through the enthusiasm of those people who wish to enjoy nature and her sun with all the benefits of a healthy body.



People who advocate nudism in Europe, do not advocate, even theoretically, of going nude on the streets. This is a strange tale which many people believe and the many newspapers hint this belief in many of their stories on the nudist movement in Europe.

The nudist movement in France is not as widely spread as the movement of Germany. In Germany there are many nudists who do not belong to any organization, but who practice their doctrines privately, either at home or in unfrequented spots in the country. Many people, who are nudists in Germany, frequent the many public camps and are not members per se. The public camps give them the privacy and protection from outsiders, which allows for them to enjoy their nudism with others.

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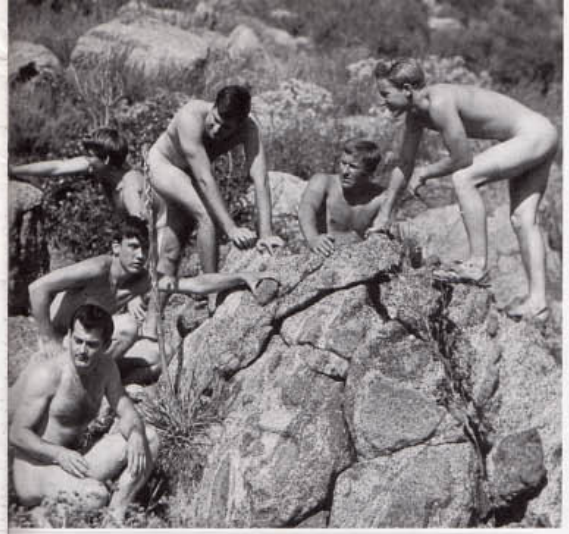
There are probably few German cities of any importance without some kind of a nudist organization. Berlin is said to have no less than thirty such clubs. There are numerous fields or parks devoted to physical culture in total nudity on the lakes in its vicinity.

We in this country can perhaps comprehend how numbers of Germans might be convinced of the benefits of nudism and put their



ideas into practice, but it is not so easy to accustom ourselves to the fact that nudism is open and respectable. With our background of censorship and prohibition, of hypocrisy and bootlegging, we cannot help feeling that nudism — no matter how convinced we may be of its morality — must be clandestine.

Yet the nudists still have to face opposition. Bitter campaigns have been waged against them by both individuals and private organizations. Some of the conspicuous leaders of the movement have been persecuted, and in a few cases have suffered materially.

In attitude toward the movement, there is a marked difference between Northern and Southern Germany. In the North, the nonnudists are tolerant to the point of indifference. They take the prac-

tice for granted, and no one suffers in standing or respectability. In the conservative Catholic South, however, particularly in Bavaria and the southern Rhineland, the feeling is bitter. Nudism still has to battle hostile opinion and defend itself against powerful offensives. Nudists caught "practicing" on unauthorized territory are not treated with the same leniency as in the North, they can expect severer penalties than a three-mark fine.

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The South has many parks for free physical culture, and Munich in particular is a center for them. The difference between the North and South is not so much in the number of nudists in the two sections as in the greater prejudice in the South that places more obstacles in their path.

Although the movement is more extensive in Germany than elsewhere, it long ago crossed the boundaries of that country. In Hungary, the movement is getting started. There is a park near Budapest, and a semi-nudist center, on the order of the naturist colony, is to be founded.

In the North, nudism has spread into the Low Lands. Holland has its movement, and many of the German periodicals carry pictures taken in Dutch nudist camps.

Even in England, the European stronghold of Puritanism, is being invaded. Naturally English nudists find many of the same obstacles as they would in America, and they have not much of an organized movement as yet. But there is a nudist movement going on in the States where families can go to camps around the country and enjoy the merriment of nudism with other people. The camps in the States have people from every age group, economic structure, and social class participating in the wonders of nature. They basically have the same activities as those camps of Europe; swimming, hiking, volleyball, picnics, and all around sunbathing.

Eventually people all over the world, who practice nudism, hope that all obstacles of hypocrisy, prudishness, and strange opinions of the naked body will subside and nudism will be a fashionable thing to do at any time.

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